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SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY ON THE NORTH CAUCASUS: NO NEWS IS NOT
NECESSARILY GOOD NEWS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a recent roundtable discussion, Russian civil society leaders expressed uniform pessimism on prospects for democratic development in the North Caucasus - despite relative calm and improved infrastructure in Chechnya. Our interlocutors predict continuing political violence and an increase in popular alienation from the Russian mainstream. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In an October 6 lunch roundtable, political prospects for the North Caucasus were debated by Deputy Chief of Mission from the Danish Embassy Soren Liborius (in his role as liaison to a major regional provider of humanitarian assistance, the Danish Refugee Council), Demos Center Chair Tanya Lokshina, Russian Justice Initiative Executive Director Ole Solvang, Human Rights Watch Moscow Deputy Director Sasha Petrov, and Professor Sergey Arutyunov (Chief of the Caucasus Section of the Institute of Ethnology of the Russian Academy of Science).

Power Politics

¶3. (SBU) Lokshina, who last visited the region in October 2007, acknowledged that Russia's policy of "Chechenization" of the conflict in the North Caucasus has worked in so far as political violence has decreased in the Chechen Republic. There were no abductions in Chechnya in April 2007 and about 10 over the succeeding summer, with "only" two abductees disappearing entirely. Lokshina argued that the new relative security of Chechnya's residents is thanks to an order conveyed by Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov. It is also possible, Lokshina stressed, that family members are at present too frightened of retaliation to report their relatives' abductions.

¶4. (SBU) Lokshina called Kadyrov's Chechnya a well-organized totalitarian society. Kadyrov has stationed all media and NGOs in one building in Grozny, the better to monitor them, she said. Kadyrov's and his father Ahmad Kadyrov's portraits are everywhere in Grozny - not just in public spaces where the government posts them but in private homes and shops, seemingly as a talisman against state-sponsored violence. Although Kadyrov has done a lot to rebuild Chechnya, especially Grozny, Lokshina said it seemed to her that reconstruction had actually stalled recently. Either money from the federal budget has dried up, Lokshina concluded, or Kadyrov is using a greater portion of it to enrich himself and his cronies.

¶5. (SBU) Arutyunov differed with Lokshina on this score, arguing that Kadyrov (unlike more rapacious counterparts in neighboring republics) continued to parcel out monies in a manner that ensured continued economic growth and regeneration. Taking a longer view, Arutyunov compared Chechnya under the Kadyrovs to Haiti under the Duvalier regime. Kadyrov's short-term success, he argued, was due to the relative homogeneity of Chechnya (compared to Dagestan), which meant that Kadyrov had a ruling clan clique with its equivalent of a Tonton Macoute-type army. However, Arutyunov said that no amount of security can protect Kadyrov from his many enemies, and he predicted he would be assassinated like his father.

16. (SBU) Solvang agreed with Lokshina that any reduction in disappearances is thanks to a political order from above and not to the development of indigenous legal institutions. He noted that there has been only one conviction in a disappearance case in Chechnya since 1999. No new prosecutions have been brought in recent times, and those that have been reopened involve federal troops, not the vigilante "Kadyrovtsy," as defendants. Liborius, who regularly travels to the North Caucasus to monitor Danish-sponsored aid projects there, remarked that attempts by international NGOs to create relevant institutions in the Chechen government had been unsuccessful so far and raised questions about the sustainability of these international programs.

Cultural Divide

17. (U) Meanwhile, Lokshina added, due to ethnic Russians' flight during the first and second Chechen wars and the deep alienation of Chechen society from the center, rural Chechen children cannot read or write Russian and are ill-prepared for the education on offer, as textbooks are in Russian only. These circumstances bode ill for their longer-term integration in Russian society, Lokshina stated. (Comment: PRM has been funding Russian-language preschool programs for Chechen refugee children in Ingushetia. Lokshina's observation may argue for expansion of such programming to Chechnya in the interest of peacebuilding. End Comment.)

18. (SBU) More worrying still, the lunch guests agreed, moderate Chechen nationalism was being replaced among the economically and politically disenfranchised by militant pan-Islamism that, thanks to the Chechen diaspora, is spreading to other North Caucasus republics. There, cumulative local grievances over lack of employment, ethnic discrimination, and political repression

generated greater support for violence. The short-sighted GOR response has been to follow its management model from the Chechen conflict: prop up weak (with the possible exception of Kadyrov) governors who are loyal to the center, and crack down on any dissent, including by restricting reporting from the region. Arutyunov noted that the growing alienation in the region existed despite the fact that the current rulers (put in place under Dmitry Kozak's watch as PolPred) were all arguably "better" than their predecessors, with the notable exception of Ingushetia President Zyazikov.

19. (SBU) Our interlocutors concluded that popular frustration, particularly in neighboring Ingushetia and Dagestan, may rise, with a commensurate increase in terrorist bombings. Arutyunov spoke of a "vicious circle" in which arbitrary and abusive police conduct provokes popular protests exacerbated by ethnic divisions. The resulting instability makes Sharia law attractive, and a widespread turn to Islam makes Moscow nervous and inclined toward greater repression. Police and judicial reform are the only solution, he said, evoking laughter from a group of people convinced that these are exactly what is required -- and difficult to achieve -- nationwide.

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